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Review of William R. Farmer, The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century

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minor points" p. 85) harm what could otherwise be sound arguments. Some chapters are outstanding, and there is a good deal of extremely important material and analysis throughout the work. When the research of E. and S. is based on data rather than on speculation, they have come to sound and meaningful conclusions.

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WILLIAM R. FARMER (ed.), *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, 1998). Pp. lii + 1918. $89.95.

The publication of the *International Bible Commentary* is a hopeful sign, possibly another step in the process of making biblical analysis a multicultural, multinational enterprise. The publisher is to be commended for the effort in bringing together a wide diversity of scholars and, at the same time, producing a readable, usable work—a not insignificant accomplishment, considering the annoyances of strange layouts and compositional formats in other single-volume commentaries on the Bible (e.g., the *NJBC*).

The opening section, over three hundred pages, consists of general articles on a wide range of subjects, divided into subheadings such as "Insights into the History of Biblical Interpretation," "Unleashing the Power of the Bible" (which includes "The Bible and Liturgy," "The Bible and Preaching," "The Bible in the Charismatic Movement," etc.), and "How Did We Get Our Bible?" (which includes essays on archaeology and textual criticism, and somewhat unexpectedly on Jesus, Paul, and Peter. Under "Selected Pastoral Concerns," there are such essays as "Women's Biblical Studies," "Family: An African Perspective," "Justice, Work, and Poverty," "Violence and Evil in the Bible," and "The Bible and Ecology."

Each of the articles on the books of the Bible appears to be constructed according to a general outline—introductory comments (often, but not consistently, called "first reading"), sometimes followed by more specific contextual, historical, and literary observations (sometimes referred to as "second reading"), and then by specific comments on selected passages. Usually a brief (sometimes *very* brief) bibliography for further reading is included. The fluidity of the structure of these articles is less distracting than one might expect, since authors appear to have been given some welcome freedom in developing their comments. There is a section at the end of the book entitled, "Pastoral Guide for the Use of the Bible in Preaching," which is a somewhat odd arrangement of subjects with passages listed after each heading: "Aaron," "Abba," "Intercession," "Kingdom of God," and so on. Finally, there is a short collection of some seventeen maps for both the OT and the NT periods.

There are many contributors from the United States and Europe, several from Central and South America, but fewer from Africa and Asia. The list of contributors, incidentally, does not provide institutional affiliations. One can only presume that this was in itself an attempt at some egalitarianism, but it makes further dialogue with the

writers difficult. While one can sympathize with the editorial difficulties involved in seeking participation and coordinating such an international project, it is here that my questions begin.

In my opinion, the commentaries in the OT section (where I am most competent to offer observations) are consistently thoughtful and, indeed, scholarly, but are they major contributions to biblical studies? Part of answering this question depends on one's understanding of the editor's goals. One of the goals, clearly, was to gather good scholars for a work that would be translated into diverse languages so that the work of these scholars might perhaps be available to readers outside the English-speaking world for the first time. This was obviously the reason for asking André LaCocque, for example, to write on Daniel. LaCocque is by any account one of the most brilliant writers on Daniel in the late twentieth century, but his work is already required reading for any serious study of the Book of Daniel. The same is true of other accomplished Western scholars such as Lawrence Boadt writing on Genesis and Joseph Blenkinsopp writing on prophecy. An explicitly stated goal is that this volume be translated into Spanish and "other languages," but will it be translated into truly widespread and international languages underserved by strong academic biblical scholarship, such as Arabic or Chinese? The logic of requesting scholarly statements from major Western scholars seems strained if their work is not going to be translated into non-western languages for people whose knowledge of English cannot be expected —especially lay persons and students.

Among the introductory comments is the hopeful thought that "the works of the exegetes will be in some way a reflection of their own cultures" (p. xxvii). A central point in consciously publishing an "international" biblical commentary should be precisely that of soliciting a wide variety of culturally diverse observations on the biblical texts, yet it is rare indeed that authors of the OT section offer observations that diverge notably, in either conclusions or methodologies, from what one would expect from a standard, Western, North American or European reading of the biblical texts. Milton Schwantes, for example, identified as a Brazilian, provides a short page of introduction to the commentary on Exodus in which he all too briefly notes the importance of Exodus themes for Latin American liberation theology, yet in the commentary that follows, John Craghan (from the United States)—quite capable and erudite from a traditionally western exegetical perspective—touches on liberation and feminist themes only lightly, on two pages of the lengthy commentary. The bibliography does not even refer the reader to non-Western interpretations of the Book of Exodus. In a commentary intended to solicit international opinion, with a numerically strong group of Latin American writers, this seems an odd omission indeed, especially for the Book of Exodus!

One begins with great hope to read the treatment of Ruth by the Nigerian scholar Ofosu Adutwum. Early on, he notes that the concern of the story of Ruth is to "bring into sharp focus the significance of community and the impact it has on human life and existence" (p. 567). How disappointing, then, to have this point illustrated by the explanation *not* of a word, tradition, or social practice from Africa, but of a *German* word, *Gemeinschaftstreue*. Not a single reference to an African work

on the Book of Ruth is found in the bibliography. I suspect that a close reading of Adutwum's commentary on Ruth would suggest interesting insights that come out of his Nigerian identity, but one must dig all too carefully for such golden nuggets in ground that is otherwise quite comfortably Western.

Similarly, I turned with some anticipation to the comments on Lamentations by the Argentinian contributor Victor Manuel Fernandez. Surely comments about the Book of Lamentations from the perspective of a Latin American—an Argentinian at that—would bring forth insights and comparisons from the life of this nation and this people. But one feels cheated by a short thought, the only apparent nod in this direction: "The contemporaneity of this book is indisputable since today similar situations continue to repeat themselves in countries scourged by hunger, war, and other group calamities" (p. 1038). And what of Argentina? Silence.

Finally, after reflection, the very "internationalism" of the volume is debatable. One is left with the nagging impression that for all its impressive qualities as a very capable, useful commentary, the *International Bible Commentary* is all too convincing as testimony to the continued Western captivity of biblical exegesis. The work is a useful research tool for advanced students and adult learners, and I have already recommended it as such to adult students. Furthermore, I hope that the plans for translations of it will encourage new levels of dialogue. But does it contain truly "multicultural," "international," exegesis? In my view, we still await such a commentary, particularly from the Catholic context in which the vast international affiliations give one hope that such a truly multicultural dialogue in biblical studies will be cultivated.

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ROBERT GOLDENBERG, *The Nations That Know Thee Not: Ancient Jewish Attitudes towards Other Religions* (Biblical Seminar 52; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Pp. xi + 215. Paper £12.95, $19.95.

This well-documented book is a review of evidence from the period of Israel's monarchy until the early rabbinic period for Jewish attitudes toward other religions. The book is divided into five substantial chapters plus an introduction, a conclusion, and a transitional chapter between the biblical and postbiblical material. Chap. 2 is a consideration of the wide variety of stances towards non-Israelite religions in the biblical texts. In chaps. 4 and 5 Goldenberg looks at postbiblical expressions of hostility towards other religions in "middle Judaism." Then he examines evidence for expressions of religious tolerance in Jewish texts from the Roman period (chap. 6). Finally, chap. 7 is a study of the evidence in the rabbinical literature. The actual text is only about half of the monograph as a whole. The other half consists of annotations to the text, an eleven-page bibliography, and three indexes (of ancient sources, of subjects, and of authors).